

# Yupiit School District

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November 24, 2003

Mr. Darroll Hargraves, Chair  
Local Boundary Commission  
550 W. 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 1770  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Dear Mr. Hargraves:

This letter is in response to your correspondence of November 10, concerning the directive (page 10, section 1, chapter 83, SLA 2003) from the 2003 Alaska Legislature concerning school consolidation. While Yupiit School District has well over the threshold number of 250 students in districts being looked at for possible consolidation, it is my understanding we are being considered on the basis of being one of the state's newer districts. I would like to express my disagreement with this action on several counts.

First I believe local control and autonomy when our children's education is involved is of the utmost importance. If the Yupiit School District were to consolidate with another district, our people would no longer have the influence they now have upon their children's schooling. Instead of two or three representatives from each village on the Regional School Board, a village would be lucky to have one. When a move such as consolidation happens to our people instead of by them, through democratically held elections, there is a sense of loss and lack of ownership in the resulting organization.

Second, Yupiit School District is one of the few districts in the state experiencing an increase in student population. Over the past 10 years, YSD has seen a 19% gain in student count, while statewide numbers have only seen a gain of 9%. In that same time period, our state funding for education has increased only 8%. In other words, in 1993, we were spending approximately \$10,630 per child. This year, we will have \$9,854, nearly \$1,000 less to educate each child. When inflation is factored in, it is very clear YSD has learned to do more with less, to live within our means, and to get the biggest return on each dollar possible.

**Henry Lott Memorial School**  
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**Arlicaq School**  
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**Akiachak Elementary School**  
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**Moses Peter Memorial High School**  
P.O. Box 51190  
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Third, this whole discussion appears to be void of what should be our main goal: Increasing student achievement. I realize YSD is on district and school improvement lists. However, we are making great strides in improving education and student test scores. If we were to become part of a larger district, the attention to each individual child could not be at the level we achieve now. In looking at neighboring schools, and in particular, the schools of Lower Kuskokwim School District, I do not see the improvements being made that we are achieving. If we were to be absorbed by LKSD, I am afraid we would just be "one of many" failing bush schools in their district. Now we feel the pinch very personally and are working very hard to see improvement in our students.

In your letter, you asked two specific questions. I would like to address these in closing.

1. *Given the considerable administrative and managerial duties associated with operating a public school district, at what point does the best interests of Alaska's children and the best interests of the general public compel school consolidation?*

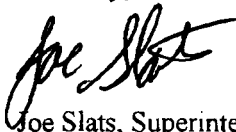
Student achievement must be the determining factor in school consolidation. If it can be demonstrated scientifically that students from larger districts perform better, this would be a valid reason for consolidation. The "best interests of the general public" would be compelling when the general public is crying for consolidation. It has been my observation so far the only ones crying for consolidation are the legislators. As one of my board members so eloquently put it, "We ought not to be stingy with our children." If we balance the state budget on the backs of our children, we will all lose.

2. *If some form of school consolidation is directed by the Alaska legislature, what options should be considered first?*

I do not believe there is a time when school consolidation should happen as the result of a directive from the State Legislature. This ought to be a decision made by the people who will be affected by the consolidation, the voters of this great state.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my opinions.

Sincerely,



Joe Slats, Superintendent

JS/cr

Cc: Roger Sampson